

Agenda Item 5 (I)

GM Free Britain

This letter is for the attention of all Borough Council Members.

Further to my letter of the 13 February to the Leader of the Council concerning GM free Britain, I would like to put this letter of the 2 April forward to be included on the agenda of the next Council meeting on the 24 April as I think there should be a full debate on the GM issue.

There has been GM crop trials for the past 3 years, and later in the year the government will decide whether to grow GM crops commercially. With this deadline in mind I would like this Council to declare this area of Berkshire to be GM free, and to lobby the government for legal protection in this area.

By using the Local Government Act 2000 S2, it gives all local authorities very broad powers to do anything which it considers is likely to promote or improve the environmental well-being of its area.

For this Council to recognise that:

- Genetic modification of crop plants is a relatively new branch of science and technology;
- That there is still scientific debate about the safety of GM crops;
- That the commercial growing of GM crops presents legal, economic, social and ethical problems that have not yet been properly addressed;

And declares that:

- This area of Berkshire will be kept free of GM crops and GM food and feed. "Further, this council recognises that the following issues are of particular concern to the people of Berkshire area and are of particular importance to the protection of the environment of Berkshire."
- The amount of land under organic management.
- The number and size of designated wildlife habitats.
- The number of bee keepers.
- The presence of wild relatives of GM crops.
- The number of food business engaged in local and added value food production.
- The terms of any local sustainability or community plants and the objectives of any local biodiversity action plan.
- The number of farmers who produce their own farm-saved seeds.
- Any sites of special scientific interest or other specially protected areas.
- The value of the area's natural environment and organic agriculture to the local tourist industry.
- Presence of rare species in any habitat.
- Number and length of which water courses.
- Extent use of ground water.
- Provision of school and social service meals.
- Food outlets and restaurants – tourism.
- Supermarket food.

These are only a few examples of what might be affected, not all the facts are known as we have not done any medical trials on plants.

The Council therefore commits:

- To ensure that no GM crops are grown on land which it has control, e.g. farm and park land, gardens, allotments, etc.
- To adopting a GM-free policy for all goods and services for which the Council is responsible.

And

- To write to the European Commission (within the 30 day period set out in Art. 24 of Directive 2001/18), in respect of each prospective Part C Marketing Consent, commenting on the summary dossier and requesting that the Commission impose a condition under Article 19(3)(c) of that Directive, exempting the geographical area of Bracknell Forest Borough Council from the ambit of any such consent in order to protect the environment of Berkshire and to protect the integrity of Bracknell Forest Borough Council as a GM free area.
- To requesting the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to propose, or to seek from the Commission, in respect of each prospective Part C Marketing Consent (under Directive 2001/18/EC), a condition under Article 19(3)(c) of that Directive, exempting the geographical area of Bracknell Forest Borough Council from the ambit of any such consent in order to protect the environment of Berkshire and to protect the integrity of Bracknell Forest Borough Council as a GM free area.

The biotechnology companies have no legal obligation to clean up the local environment or compensate people affected in your area if a GM crop or food is found to be unsafe, so ultimately it will be the taxpayer who will pay. It may prove that the whole process is irreversible and therefore with permanent damage to the environment.

We paid dearly for the impact of foot and mouth disease and BSE, we do not want to pay for the GM mistake.

If GM goes ahead it will take over and we will not be able to have a choice of organic or non GM it will be impossible, as it will all get contaminated, as GM crops are an alien crop to nature in the environment which will infect other living organisms by cross pollination, transferring the genes into insects and animals, who eat the crops and then into the human food chain. Since there is no public demand for GM and thus no market for GM food, (major supermarkets and food retailers have removed GM ingredients from their products due to consumer demand) there would be no economic benefit for our farmers. Consumers have a right to choose wherever we live, and the English government must listen, just as the Welsh Assembly has, declaring Wales a GM free area. Some English areas are also following suit.

I understand that the GM issue is highly complex and technical in nature, most lay people will initially consider that they do not have the competence or expertise to make decisions on this issue. This is not the case. The GM issue is a matter of public environmental safety, for which we are requesting a decision to protect the general public against any potential hazard, whether realised now or in the unforeseen future.

I urge you to consider this matter very carefully, as it will affect all of us and generations to come.

Yours sincerely

Debra Gier.